



Town of Fairfield · Registrar of Voters Office
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Testimony of Matthew Waggoner, Registrar
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Dear Chairs Morin and Slossberg, Ranking Members Hwang and McLachlan, and Members of GAE,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on today's election policy items. My written testimony is below.

SB 212: AN ACT CONCERNING PROVISIONAL BALLOTS FOR STATE AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

I am in favor of allowing voters who find themselves unexpectedly ineligible to vote at the polls to vote a full ballot provisionally. A number of these ballots are counted at each Federal election now, and when it's discovered during an investigation that a voter should have been able to vote but for a data entry mistake in a Registrar's office or at the DMV, it seems unjust to have taken a portion of the ballot away from that voter. SB 212 allows this problem to be fully reversed after an appropriate examination of the facts.

Further, I appreciate the removal of challenged ballots from the election process -- unlike provisional ballots, these are in practice never counted, and there have been a handful of cases of poll workers or political entities pushing the envelope in terms of making arbitrary or capricious challenges to voters. Provisional ballots are a valuable tool in the polling place, allowing what might have been a time consuming, embarrassing, or confrontational situation to be handled to everyone's satisfaction, and to have the facts evaluated by the Registrars acting jointly and in consultation with our legal resources in statute and at the Secretary of State's office rather than having the final decision be made in the field, perhaps to the detriment of the challenged voter.

SB 218: AN ACT CONCERNING POLLING PLACES FOR PRIMARIES.

HB 5254: AN ACT CONCERNING PRIMARIES FOR MUNICIPAL OR STATE OFFICE.

The approach requiring consensus of all Registrars to reduce polling places is the correct one. As a Registrar in a large town, I am very reluctant to sacrifice accumulated voter education for a modest cost savings, and with the exception of very small districts such as those where only hundreds of voters are represented by the same State Rep and State Senator, the savings will probably be very small indeed. However, several large cities with a "party dominant" population will be opening dozens of polling places to serve fewer than a thousand voters in the coming Presidential primary, and it doesn't seem clear why this bill would prevent towns with over 20,000 voters from making the decision on cost versus voter convenience for themselves.

Also, my office became aware of a counter-intuitive requirement of our statutes in 2010, when petitions for a local question were certified such that the referendum was to be held the same week as the 2010 primaries for Governor. Section (b) of SB 218 allows the Moderators for two different party primaries to be reduced to one, but state law still requires a referendum or special election held concurrently with primaries to be held in a separate location with entirely different staff and equipment. I expect several other towns will experience this unfortunate scenario as budget referenda fall on dates near to the April primary.

I support the provision allowing offices to use the same moderator for two simultaneous primaries, but would ask that the committee consider abstracting this concept to allow for one moderator to oversee multiple election events held in the same voting district, and to permit referenda and other election events to be held in the same physical location as primaries held on the same date. HB 5254, focusing on flexibility in staffing and equipment, may also be a potential vehicle for this change.